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Valley LEAP



News Release

**Community-friendly Environmental Reporting System
Launched in Kings County**

Agencies and Community Advocates Collaborate to Prevent Pollution;
New Tools include Smart Phone App, Texting Reports & Website (www.ivan-kings.org)

Hanford, CA - Environmental hazards such as air quality, illegal dumping, toxic exposure, water quality and infrastructure have been on Rey Leon's agenda for over a decade. As the founder and executive director of the Valley Latino Environmental Advancement Project, he has experienced many challenges when residents come to him and ask for his help on environmental concerns that affect their communities. Having observed IVAN's (Identifying Violations Affecting Neighborhoods) evolution and successes, Leon was eager to bring such a resource to Kings County to establish a solution based process to improve community health.

For grassroots non-profits like Valley LEAP, leveraging resources through partnerships is crucial. Finding low-cost tools and effective strategies to increase public participation and strengthen civic leadership is just one of Valley LEAP's many objectives in hopes that disadvantaged neighborhoods don't bear a disproportionate burden of pollution or toxic exposure. "It is a great way to bring some accountability to agencies and allow greater participation from the public," says Maricela Mares from Kettleman City, a long time environmental health and justice leader from the organization El Pueblo for Clean Air and Water.

The launching of IVAN is the result of deliberate efforts by Valley LEAP to address environmental justice issues in Kings County. A new and improved version of the existing IVAN platform will assist the community in reporting environmental concerns in and around their neighborhoods. It has been customized specifically for Valley LEAP and will connect the community with an essential resource.

According to IVAN's co-creator Luis Olmedo, "IVAN has been shown to be a useful strategy in other California counties as a means for improving the health of children, families and sometimes the entire community." In addition it has been used by government agencies when they are investigating local environmental concerns which they believe could lead to legitimate enforcement actions.

Valley LEAP launched the deployment of this on-line monitoring system as a community resource for not only addressing environmental hazards but to connect residents with government agencies in a collaborative spirit. "The Department of Toxic Substances Control is proud to be a part of the Kings County IVAN," DTSC Director Barbara Lee said. "Collaborations like these enable community members to quickly report potential environmental hazards and connect with real people who can

resolve them. They also help DTSC meet its mission of protecting human health and the environment.”

An inaugural guided bus tour of environmental “hot spots” within Kings County was attended by community leaders, elected officials, business owners and concerned citizens. Over a dozen environmental hazards were recorded in just one short hour. Eddy Reyes, a community leader from Hanford who participated in the bus tour believes ‘It will help community connect with agencies to take action”.

Not unlike Reyes, Candi Vanegas, a resident of Armona and an elected board member of the Armona Community Services District agrees that, “It will benefit the community with awareness on issues and solutions to improve our families health.”

While Leon recognizes that IVAN may not be an immediate remedy for long-standing environmental hazards, especially those protected under legal discretion, he is encouraged by the access the platform has afforded other communities similar to his. “It is my hope, that IVAN will magnify our ability to meet the needs of our communities when called upon to educate, advocate, and collaborate,” says Leon.

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